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ABSTRACT

Guidelines for the employment of part-time college teachers are offered by the Modern Language Association. It is suggested that each department should develop a long-range plan that clarifies the use of both temporary and permanent part-time teachers in terms of departmental needs and goals. If there is a recurrent need for part-time teachers, departments should consider establishing a cadre of permanent part-timers who receive appropriate fringe benefits and incentives that foster professional development. It is important to treat part-time teachers as professionals. They should be hired and reviewed according to processes comparable to those for full-time faculty. In addition to having mailboxes, office space, and clerical support, they should receive an adequate introduction to their teaching assignments, departments, and institutions. Their salary should be pro-rated or should reflect their teaching duties, and extra assigned duties should be paid by stipends. In some cases, part-timers should be able to participate in departmental policymaking and planning for courses they teach. Colleges are advised that unplanned, excessive use of part-timers exacerbates administrative difficulties, invites student dissatisfaction, and threatens the quality of education. (SW)

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Modern Language Association

Statement on the Use of Part-Time Faculty

The recent dramatic increase in the use of part-time teachers in many departments of English and foreign languages is already threatening departmental integrity, professional standards, and academic excellence. Although some part-time appointments add significant dimensions to curricula and some professionals prefer to accept only part-time academic appointments because of other commitments, most part-time appointments are not made for educationally sound reasons. Indeed, the primary motivation for many of these appointments has been to reduce the cost of instruction.

From the point of view of the departmental administrator, part-time teachers fall into two general groups. Most are clearly temporary members of a department. Others teach from year to year and become virtually permanent. Graduate students who serve as apprentice teachers enjoy a special status in their departments and are therefore distinct from these groups.

The very conditions under which most temporary and permanent part-time teachers are employed define them as nonprofessionals. Often they are hired quickly, as last minute replacements, with only hasty review of their credentials. They receive little recognition or respect for their contributions to their departments; in many instances they are paid inequitably.

The potential damage to academic programs caused by the excessive use of part-time teachers cannot be calculated exactly, but some negative effects are unavoidable. Because part-time teachers are not treated as members of the departmental community, they often have a limited commitment to the institution and its students. Because part-time teachers rarely participate, as professionals should, in the development of courses, the continuity of sequential courses and the consistency of multisectioned courses suffer. Because part-time teachers are rarely available to advise students or, if available, may not be fully informed about institutional programs, inordinately heavy responsibility for advising falls to the full-time faculty. In addition, because of the low professional standing of part-time teachers, their frequent assignment to composition and introductory language courses diminishes the importance of basic courses at a time when society recognizes a need for special attention to this part of the curriculum.

In the face of present conditions and concern about the decline in quality of humanities programs, the MLA urges college and university administrations to make new and concerted efforts to eliminate the excessive use of part-time teachers, to improve the conditions under which part-time teachers are employed, and to recognize the professional status and important contributions of such teachers. Continuation of excessive, unplanned use of part-time teachers can only exacerbate administrative difficulties, invite student dissatisfaction, and threaten the quality of education.

The MLA offers the following guidelines for the employment of part-time teachers.

Guidelines

1. Each department should develop a long-range plan that clarifies the use of both temporary and permanent part-time teachers in terms of departmental needs and goals. This plan should establish an appropriate limit on how many part-time teachers may be hired in relation to the number of full-time faculty and graduate students who serve as apprentice teachers.

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2. All part-time teachers should be treated as professionals. They should be hired and reviewed according to processes broadly comparable to those established for full-time faculty. They should be given mailboxes, office space, and clerical support. They should receive adequate introduction to their teaching assignments, departments, and institutions. They should either be paid a pro-rata salary or receive a just salary that accurately reflects their teaching duties and an additional stipend for any duties outside the classroom they are asked to assume. When appropriate and in accordance with well thought out policies, part-time teachers should participate in determining departmental policies and in planning the courses they teach.

3. If there is a recurrent need for the services of part-time teachers, departments should consider establishing a cadre of permanent part-time teachers. In addition to the privileges outlined in item 2, above, these teachers should receive appropriate fringe benefits and incentives that foster professional development, for example, merit raises and access to research and travel funds.

(NB: This statement was developed by an ad hoc committee of the Association of Departments of English.)

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